

THE MYTH OF *OCTOPUS GIGANTEUS* VERRILL, 1897:  
A WHALE OF A STORY

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The work of Gennaro (1971) and Mackel (1986) on samples of tissue from the Florida Sea Monster, *Octopus giganteus* Verrill, 1897 led them to the conclusion that it was indeed, an *Octopus*. Their identification was accepted by Johnson (1989:39), though Verrill (1897), himself, was sure that his identification was erroneous. Over the years among the other believers that the monster was an *Octopus* were Wood (1971), Mangiacopora (1975, 1977), and Mangiacopora *et al.* (1994, 1995). The last work was titled, "Final vindication for *Octopus giganteus*."

However, very shortly thereafter, Pierce *et al.* (1995), on the basis of electron microscopy and amino acid analyses of tissue from specimens saved from the creature grounded so many years before on a Florida beach, concluded that the tissue was certainly part of an ordinary whale. A great blob washed into a lagoon in Bermuda during the summer of 1988 was also studied by them, and they concluded from its amino acid fingerprint that it was part of a cold-blooded fish, shark, or ray. Dr. Clyde Roper, curator of invertebrate zoology at the National Museum of Natural History was impressed with the rigor of the research by Pierce *et al.*, and he was quoted by Weiss (1995), "This settles the question of the Florida Sea Monster and the Bermuda Blob." Alas, neither was an invertebrate.

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